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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 006520

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER KDEM CE BG IN

SUBJECT: INDIA, US "CONVERGE" ON SRI LANKA, LESS ON
BANGLADESH - JOINT SECRETARY KUMAR

Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a September 18 courtesy call, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Joint Secretary Mohan Kumar told PolCouns:

-- India and the U.S. have a "broad convergence" of interests on Sri Lanka;
-- India continues to tell the GSL that there can be no military solution to the conflict, and now is the time for the GSL to use statesmanship and an advantageous bargaining position to advance the peace process;
-- Were it not for U.S. and Indian persistence, the GSL would no longer support Norway as head of the Co-Chairs;
-- Domestic Indian politics have less influence in GOI policy toward Sri Lanka than in the past; and
-- The U.S. underestimates the terror threat stemming from Bangladesh, although otherwise U.S. and Indian policies toward Bangladesh are similar.

End Summary.

COORDINATED, CONVERGENCE ON SRI LANKA

¶2. (C) In a September 18 courtesy call, PolCouns discussed India's assessment of recent developments in Sri Lanka and prospects for successful elections in Bangladesh with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Joint Secretary for Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Maldives (BSM) Mohan Kumar. PolCouns noted the close coordination between senior officials in the USG and GOI taking place in Colombo and elsewhere, and urged Kumar for his cooperation in continuing similar close coordination in New Delhi. Kumar agreed, adding he appreciated his meetings with U/S Burns and A/S Boucher on all of the issues in his portfolio.

¶3. (C) Offering his assessment on Sri Lanka, Kumar said he felt there was a "broad convergence" of interests between the U.S. and India. India continues to support the Co-Chairs group, specifically Norway's chairmanship, Kumar stated. In fact, it is only because of India and the U.S.' persistence

that Norway continues to have Colombo's support, Kumar explained, as "Southern opinion has swung completely against Norway" due to GSL perception that Oslo has been an apologist for LTTE transgressions. Due to Colombo's mistrust for Norway, the GSL is now asking for the next Co-Chairs meeting not to take place in Oslo. In terms of other "convergence," Kumar confirmed India will participate in the September 27 Contact Group meeting in Washington, most likely with an expert supplied from its Embassy. Additionally, India is "doing everything possible" to coordinate its position with the U.S. in order to keep the peace process moving forward. While the GSL appears to have made significant military gains in recent weeks, India's message to Colombo remains that there will be no military solution to the peace process, and that the GSL must behave in a statesmanlike fashion and lead to a negotiated settlement. "We need to stop the government from taking the attitude, 'We're doing well (militarily); why do we need to talk?'" Kumar said.

INTERNAL POLITICS LESS OF A FACTOR

¶4. (C) Internal Indian politics play less of a role in India's policy toward Sri Lanka than in the past, Kumar said, citing Tamil Nadu Governor Barnala's recent endorsement of the GOI's policy toward Sri Lanka. "There is a tremendous difference from the 1980s and 1990s," Kumar said, adding that many people who live in Tamil Nadu and used to sympathize toward the LTTE now say they want nothing to do with the group, although they will still help Tamil refugees. However, even the refugees have changed, according to Kumar. Citing exit interviews the GOI does with refugees entering Tamil Nadu, he stated, whereas in the past Tamil's were

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crossing the Palk Strait to avoid being caught in fighting, today many are fleeing to avoid being forced into the LTTE military -- often as child soldiers.

U.S., INDIA CLOSE ON BANGLADESH, BUT...

¶5. (C) Saying U.S. and Indian positions "don't entirely converge" on Bangladesh due to under-appreciation by the USG of the terrorist threat stemming from India's eastern neighbor, Kumar stated that nonetheless our two countries' interests were very close. The top issue from India's perspective, according to Kumar, is that Dhaka "is in total denial" that terrorists are organizing within and transiting through Bangladesh's borders. In terms of where the U.S. and India can work together, Kumar emphasized the importance of the next parliamentary election being "credible," and said the international community must be united in promoting free and fair elections, either through a UN election monitoring mission or some other body, such as a Commonwealth commission or through credible international NGOs. The integrity of the election process is threatened by: 1) a corrupt election commission; 2) non-credible voter lists; and 3) the "fixed" promotion of the Chief Justice, whom Kumar assumes would head the next caretaker government. The election is the Awami League's to lose, Kumar opined, yet should it believe any two of the three above cannot be resolved in time, it may have no choice but to boycott the election, regardless of how poor a tactical choice that may seem to be.

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